

Deseret Morning News, Saturday, July 29, 2006

'Heartland' is exciting, energetic, enlightening

Two groups tell the immigrant's song in enlightening fashion

By Carma Wadley

Deseret Morning News

NANNETTE BRODIE DANCE THEATRE, CABOOSE, Marriott Center for Dance, University of Utah, Thursday

Who can sing the immigrant's song? Who can dance the immigrant's dance? We all can, to some extent, as everyone here has roots that reach beyond our shores.

But few can do it better than the Nannette Brodie Dance Theatre and Caboose.

The two groups took the audience on a multi-media journey into the Heartland, as they traced what immigration has meant to our land. Roots music at its finest combined with expressive movement in a program that was at times poignant and at times joyful, but always exciting, energetic and enlightening.

The concert represented a Salt Lake debut for both groups. The nine-member NBDT is based in Long Beach, Calif., where it has a tradition of using dance to explore "our environment, our culture and our world."

Five-member Caboose is an offshoot of Salt Lake's Enoch Train folk ensemble, scaled down just for performances just as this. NBDT danced to pre-recorded Enoch Train music, and in between Caboose performed live. It made for a varied and entertaining package.

Caboose's music ranged from Celtic to Cajun, from swing to polka, from cowboy laments to seafaring chants. The group demonstrated amazing skill, each member playing a variety of instruments — only Daron Bradford can turn a keyboard into a wind instrument!

Rob Honey and Tom Hewitson added some rich vocals on "The Coast of Malabar," "Night Rider's Lament" and "Jambalaya." Nate Olson's fiddle smoked on pieces such as "David's Jig" and "Calliope House/Cowboy Jig." Bradford stepped up the tempo on "Clarinet Polka."

In addition to his music, Clive Romney's introductions also added meaning and context to each song.

They were clearly having fun throughout the evening — but never more than on "I Lobster and Never Flounder," a song that captures our love of wordplay.

Members of NBDT were equally impressive, as they demonstrated both athleticism and grace on such numbers as "Welcoming," "Distant Promises," "Faith, Hope, Love" and "El Mundo de las Mujeres."

Film clips, immigrant sentiments, excerpts from speeches and poetry effectively set up each selection, but the dancers also added emotion and feeling that pulled you right in. Especially moving was the final "Amazing Gift," which played out to a medley of "Amazing Grace" and "Simple Gifts."

"Heartland: An Immigrant's Song" was a thought-provoking, fun-filled evening that made you come away wanting to sing your own song to ancestors and others who came before.

E-mail: carma@desnews.com

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